NEWS

Winchester ZBA could soon make decision on Washington/Swanton development

NEIL ZOLOT | CORRESPONDENT

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The Winchester Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) could soon make a decision on the Washington/Swanton development project. WINCHESTER NEWS FILE PHOTO

The Winchester Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) seems to have all information it needs to make a decision on a proposed Chapter 4

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apartment proposal at the intersection of Washington and Swanton streets.

“It’ll be sort of wrapping things up tonight and moving forward on deliberations,” ZBA Chair Dorothy Simboli said on Feb. 26. “We would use the next 40 days or up to 40 days to deliberate.”

Based on the advice of Town Counsel Karis North, the public hearing on the project is being continued, not closed.

“She thinks we should leave it open, in case we have questions,” Simboli explained. “It’s the expectation she would draft something and come back to us.”

The matter is on agendas for meetings on March 12 and 19, with another meeting possible before the end of the month.

“We want to make sure there isn't something that should be in there that isn’t,” member Harout Ghazarian said of the timeline.

“The board needs whatever is there for a decision with conditions, but to the extent we can, it would be helpful for us to participate,” said Mark Vaughn, attorney for the Melanson Development Group (MDG). “We’re here to assist you.”

Vaughn added he feels things will go smoothly.

“I believe the elements are in order in regard to civil engineering and stormwater,” he said. “Peer review reports came in on the engineering as well as reports from Town Engineer Matt Shuman. There are some suggestions he had related to traffic, which we are comfortable with.”

What is Chapter 40B?

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Mass. General Law Chapter 40B, the so-called "Comprehensive Permit Act" or anti-snob zoning, eliminates separate permits for developers from various boards in favor of one permit from a community ZBA in order to promote affordable housing.

Developers are not required to comply with height limitations, required distances from property boundaries, how much green space must be left on a parcel, how many parking spaces must be provided, and other criteria. They are even allowed certain latitudes with building ordinances such as solar and net zero requirements.

In exchange for 20-25% affordable housing, a 40B development is able to sidestep zoning ordinances and municipal requirements.

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The state has imposed a 10% threshold of affordable housing for communities to avoid 40B developments. Safe Harbor is a term to describe the protections a city enjoys when in compliance with the state requirement of affordable housing. An incentive to communities is that all rental units, as opposed to units for sale, regardless of their affordability, count as affordable units in calculations as to whether it meets the threshold for Safe Harbor.

The 278-292 Washington St. and 12 and 16-20 Swanton St. site will have 45 one-bedroom units, up from 37 in an earlier plan; 12 two-bedroom units, down from 17 and 7 three-bedroom units, up from 6. All rental units.

Last fall, the Melanson Development Group (MDG) increased the number of housing units from 60 to 64, while shrinking its footprint 2,300 square feet by reducing commercial space at the corner of the two street 5,656 to 3,800 square feet. The height was also reduced from 48 to

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There will be 16 affordable units in the development, 13 for residents making 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) and three at 60% of the AMI, which Vaughn said are at “the heightened level of affordability.”

During the Feb. 26 meeting, MDG architect Michelle Quinn Littlefield said the only recent changes made to the development plans are the flipping of some units from facing Washington Street to facing Swanton.

“[But] the affordable designations did not change,” she said. “We had to make some tweaks, but the count is the same.”

Simboli asked her if the Housing Authority approved the changes.

“Not formally,” Littlefield answered.

“Do they have to?” Simboli then asked.

“I don’t think so,” Littlefield answered. “It’s part of the Comprehensive Permit.”

“Getting this approved means we don’t have to come back and get site plan approval because we’re over a certain size limit,” Vaughn added. “Some of the variances relate to those nuances, like the Earth Removal Permit. We won’t have to get a Special Permit for that because it’s included.”

Editor's note: The March 12 hearing has been continued to March 19 and will no longer take place. See the Town Calendar for more details.

Neil Zolot has been a freelance journalist more than 40 years. He has worked for newspapers on the North Shore and in the Boston area.

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Winchester News reviewed precinct-level election results from every annual town election since 2014 — 13 years of data covering turnout, ballot questions, Select Board races, School Committee contests and Planning Board results — and compared them against the March 21 preliminary numbers. The 2026 results have not yet been certified by Town

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With override rejected, Winchester shifts from campaigning to budget planning

After Winchester voters rejected an $11.5 million Proposition 2 1/2 override on Election Day, March 21, the governing question in town has shifted from persuasion to arithmetic. Select Board member Bill McGonigle, who served on the Yes for Winchester campaign, said the defeat has changed how he approaches

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Network for Social Justice to celebrate 35th anniversary

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: The Network For Social Justice turns 35 this spring! There will be a celebration on Saturday, April 11, from 7-9:30 p.m., at the Sons of Italy, 117 Swanton St., Winchester. Connect with your local friends and neighbors as

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EVENTS

Winchester Community Music School presents Jazz Jam Session

The following was submitted by the Winchester Community Music School: On Saturday, March 28, join the community at Winchester Community Music School, 407 Highland Ave., for a Jazz Jam Session, an afternoon of fun, spontaneous jazz playing, beginning at 3 p.m. Instrumentalists and vocalists of all skill levels are

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